

Revisions to NIH Release of NOFOs: Navigating NIH Highlighted Topics

Office of Research Development & Strategy

August 2026



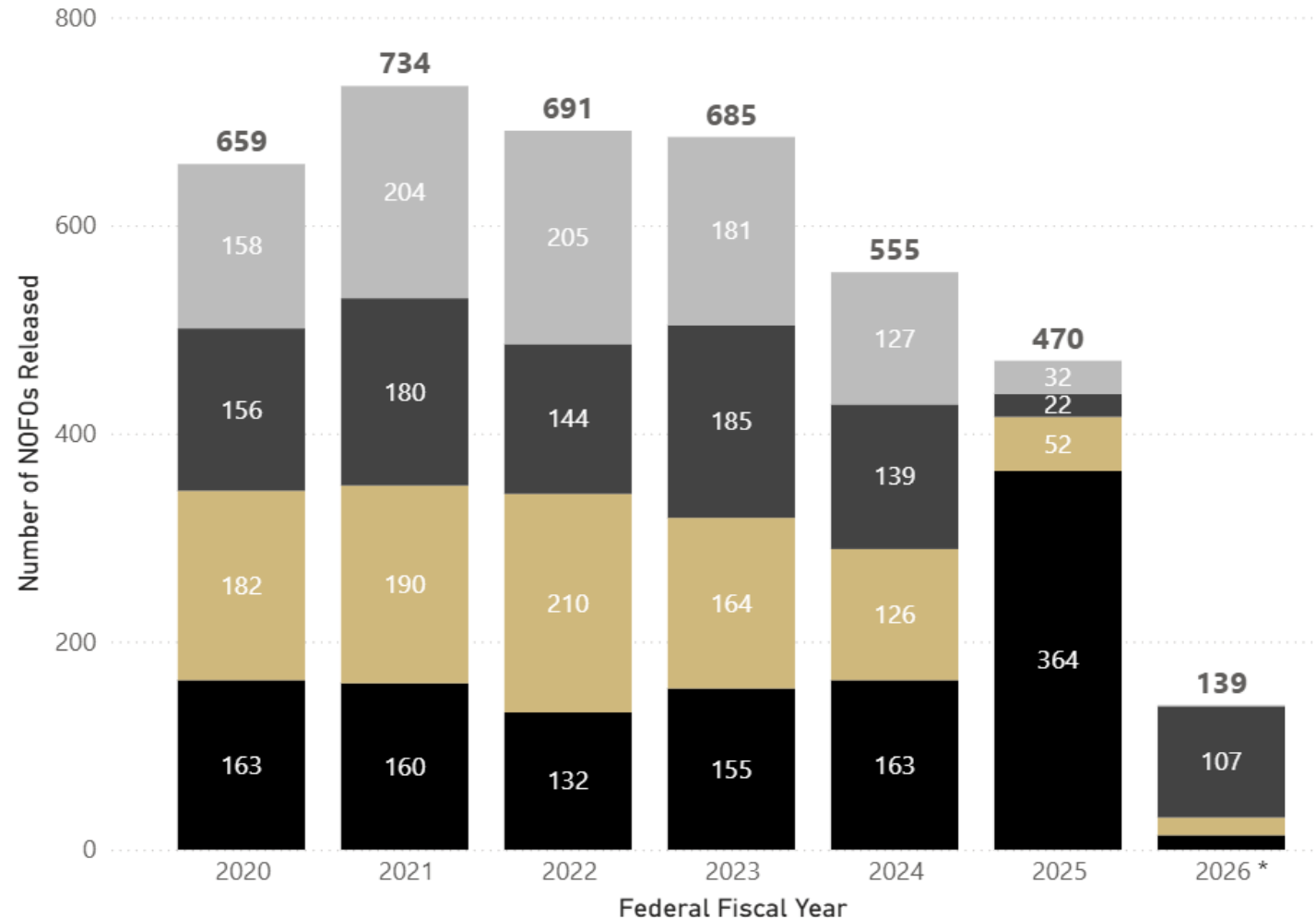
AGENDA

- NIH Funding Opportunity Trends
- Understanding NIH Highlighted Topics
- Highlighted Topics Demonstration
- Strategies for Positioning Future Proposals
- Resources



NIH Notices of Funding Opportunities (All)

Quarter ● Q1: Oct-Dec ● Q2: Jan-Mar ● Q3: Apr-June ● Q4: July-Sep



*Federal FY runs from Oct 1 - Sept 30 of the following calendar year.

FY2026 data is through Aug 11, 2026



The Transition to Highlighted Topics

Moving from topic-specific NOFOs to broad parent announcements

- Does **not** signal reduction in funding
- Provides different pathway to identifying funding opportunities
- Maintains visibility of emerging scientific priorities
- Attempts to align with IC priorities across the institution



What Are Highlighted Topics?

***“Highlighted Topics are a way to understand
NIH priorities and start a conversation.”***

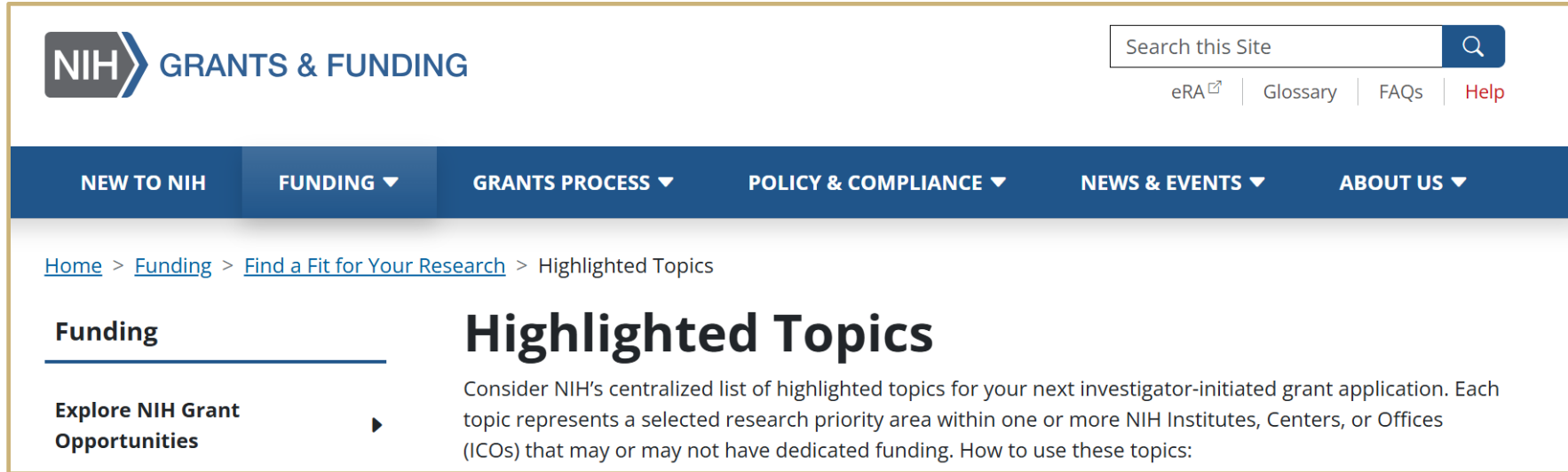
— NIH Extramural Nexus



What Are Highlighted Topics?

- New method for communicating research priorities and identifying alignment
- Recommend early engagement with NIH program officers to ensure program alignment
- Are **not** funding opportunities
- Do not specify mechanisms, deadlines, budgets or eligibility requirements
- Do not impact the peer review process

Navigating NIH Highlighted Topics



The screenshot shows the NIH Grants & Funding website. At the top left is the NIH logo and 'GRANTS & FUNDING' text. To the right is a search bar labeled 'Search this Site' with a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar are links for 'eRA', 'Glossary', 'FAQs', and 'Help'. A dark blue navigation bar contains links for 'NEW TO NIH', 'FUNDING', 'GRANTS PROCESS', 'POLICY & COMPLIANCE', 'NEWS & EVENTS', and 'ABOUT US'. Below this bar is a breadcrumb trail: 'Home > Funding > Find a Fit for Your Research > Highlighted Topics'. On the left side, under the 'Funding' header, is a link 'Explore NIH Grant Opportunities'. The main content area is titled 'Highlighted Topics' and contains a paragraph: 'Consider NIH's centralized list of highlighted topics for your next investigator-initiated grant application. Each topic represents a selected research priority area within one or more NIH Institutes, Centers, or Offices (ICOs) that may or may not have dedicated funding. How to use these topics:'.

<https://grants.nih.gov/funding/find-a-fit-for-your-research/highlighted-topics>

Also Access From:

- Office of Research Development and Strategy (ORDS) [website](#)
- ORDS *Funding Focus* [newsletter](#)

Topic Description

- Explains the “why”
- Communicates broader scientific need it is trying to address
- Rationale that reviewers & program staff may consider important
- Provides what NIH wants to encourage through this Highlighted Topic, often including examples

Topic Description

Post Date: June 24, 2026

Expiration Date: June 24, 2028

Background

NIH aims to maximize the return on research and clinical care through investments in data generation, data infrastructure, cloud resources, [FAIR Principles](#)[↗]-guided data management and sharing, and data science. Additionally, there is growing need for novel statistical and computational methods to address unique designs and complex data types. Multiple NIH ICOs have independently invested in efforts that demonstrate the value of data sharing and use. However, more strategic alignment and coordination across NIH ICOs are needed to address data underutilization and empower the research community to generate data-driven insights, validate findings, and accelerate translation to improved health outcomes.

Purpose

This Highlighted Topic encourages rigorous, innovative research in utilizing publicly accessible, high-quality datasets. It aims to enhance reproducibility, enable data-driven hypothesis generation, accelerate scientific discovery, and ultimately improve disease prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and patient outcomes.

Participating ICOs

- Which NIH institutes, centers & offices are interested in this topic
- What disease areas or scientific questions they prioritize
- Signals ICO's level of interest:
 - May provide **special funding consideration**/have set aside funding for applications that align
- Identifies the ICO's scientific contacts

Participating ICOs

[National Institute on Aging \(NIA\)](#)

NIA supports research using behavioral and cognitive signals from human-based real-world data to advance understanding of aging-related change, including early pathophysiological, psychological aging, and functional decline. Priority areas include methods to detect cognitive impairment, Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, and changes affecting independence and quality of life in later life.

Areas of interest include:

- Behavioral and cognitive signals sensitive to early or preclinical stages of dementia, including subtle changes in daily cognition, function, or behavior.
- Real-world indicators of psychological aging, such as changes in affect, motivation, stress regulation, or social engagement.
- Functional measures derived from everyday activities (e.g., mobility, navigation, task organization, communication) reflecting meaningful changes in autonomy.
- Longitudinal approaches linking behavioral and cognitive signals to trajectories of aging, disease progression, and resilience.

ICO Scientific Contact:

Luke Stoeckel, Ph.D.
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Special Funding Considerations

ICs WITH SPECIAL FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS

- Reserved/set-aside funds for the specific topic
- Topic alignment may strengthen meritorious proposals during funding selection

ICs WITHOUT SPECIAL FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS

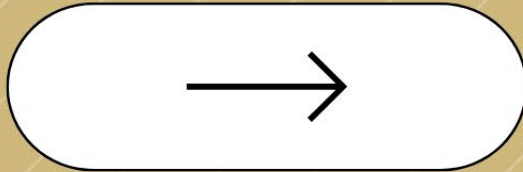
- Communicating scientific interest
- No reserved/set-aside funds for the specific topic
- Funding is contingent on IC funding availability



This information can help form important questions to ask the program officer.

HIGHLIGHTED TOPICS

DEMONSTRATION



Find Funding

HIGHLIGHTED TOPICS PAGE:

- Title of Highlighted Topic
- Find your IC's linked page
- Use the search tool for IC's funding opportunities:
 - Advanced Search Criteria: Funding Opportunity Type: Parent Announcement
 - Explore NOFOs

EXPLORE NIH GRANT OPPORTUNITIES PAGE:

- Advanced Search Criteria: Funding Opportunity Type: Parent Announcement
- Explore NOFOs

From Highlighted Topic to Competitive Proposal

BEFORE YOU WRITE ...

Utilize existing resources:

- **NIH RePORTER** - Identify recently funded projects in the topic area, what is prioritized across IC portfolios
- **Office of Research Development & Strategy support:**
 - **1:1 consultation** on navigating & utilizing Highlighted Topics; provides lists of Highlighted Topics relevant to specified research areas
 - **Funding Landscape Dashboard:** provides intelligence on institute portfolios, success rates for similar projects, can help identify appropriate IC and PO contacts

From Highlighted Topic to Competitive Proposal

“Highlighted Topics are a way to understand NIH priorities and start a conversation.”

— NIH Extramural Nexus



Connect with a Program Officer:

- Make contact early in the proposal development process
- Socialize your alignment
- Discuss programmatic fit
- Determine if there is set-aside funding
- Discuss your plan for addressing alignment in your proposal



From Highlighted Topic to Competitive Proposal

IN THE PROPOSAL ...

- Incorporate feedback from Program Officer
- Demonstrate and communicate alignment throughout the application
 - Specific Aims page
 - Significance section
 - Impact statements
 - Biosketch personal statement



Contacts & Resources

CONTACT INFORMATION: Office of Research Development & Strategy

- 1:1 Consultation on navigating Highlighted Topics: [Jamie Kutner](#)
- Funding Landscape Data: [Haley Sisel](#)

RESOURCES:

- [Highlighted Topics webpage](#)
 - Subscribe to Highlighted Topics
 - View FAQs
- [ORDS webpage](#)
 - Explore tools, resources, grant library
 - Subscribe to Funding Focus

THANK YOU

